

NEWS RELEASE



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The City of Anniston takes first steps towards updating Zoning Ordinance

An updated zoning ordinance was just one of many things Anniston's ["One City, One Vision" Strategic Plan](#) called for, and now after configuring a team of experts, the city is taking major steps forward to see it come to fruition.

According to the city's strategic plan, current zoning rules were deemed inadequate with a need to be reviewed and updated based on a conceptual development framework. It also stated that the city could benefit from updated land management tools in order to create a stronger physical environment.

A team that included Larry Watts, director of Community Planning with Goodwyn Mills & Cawood, Stacey Browning, a community planner from Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood, Inc. in Birmingham, Jamie A. Greene, a principal for Planning Next in Columbus, Ohio, and Tom Moriarity, a managing principal for Retail & Development Strategies in Arlington, Va., met with the city council and city planning commission on Tuesday, July 15 to examine the city's current ordinance, review guidelines and standards, and discuss a scope and schedule for future developments.

"I'm really proud to be here and also proud that all the talk that happened during the vision process is being put into action," Greene said. "This is a key example of the community building from expressing what is important to them to actually doing something about it."

Greene said that a "quality of places" issue was really important to the hundreds of people that got involved in the city's strategic plan process.

"There are a lot of things that you can determine to manage the quality of place but the developmental regulations are a critical part of that," Greene said.

“What we are here to start today is to look at Anniston’s physical environment, particularly from a development standpoint, and re-look at the rules that are in place because the city does have an instrument now that legally manages how they are growing, developing, redeveloping, and changing. We are looking with what I believe are fresh eyes at what you have from a regulatory standpoint, what you have in terms of the physical framework, and then were going to be engaging the community again in the spirit of ‘One City, One Vision,’ in the next couple of months to have their input as we think about new rules in managing quality of place issues.”

Most cities in Alabama, including Anniston, use a Euclidean zoning ordinance. Euclidean zoning is based on the complete separation of uses that are believed to be incompatible. For example, residential uses are not allowed in commercial zones, and industrial uses are not allowed in commercial zones.

Anniston currently has numerous districts with design guidelines and standards. Among them are the Downtown and West 15th Street Historic Districts regulated by the Historic Preservation Commission, the CBD-1 regulated by the Planning Commission and City Council, and the McClellan Development District regulated by the Planning Commission and City Council.

“We have a very outdated zoning ordinance, so this is the first step in the process to start engaging, to look at the physical environment on paper, to look at the physical environment on the field, and start dissecting and breaking down what needs to be enhanced, improved, and changed and made current,” Greene said.

The team met with the city’s Planning and Development Services Director Toby Bennington in the morning to brainstorm and review maps and mapping issues, before taking several tours of the city, culminating in an evening joint meeting with the city council and planning commission.

“There’s been a long, long-time commitment to the City of Anniston going back 25 years or more,” Moriarity said. “This is an idea that’s been floating around for a while but it’s coming to culmination now with this leadership and that’s a good thing.”

Moriarity and Greene both believe that the work they are doing involves more than just aesthetics, especially when it comes to the city’s downtown area; they must keep an economic perspective in mind every step of the way.

“From an economic standpoint this market has stayed leveled. It has not grown and you’ve had the closing of Ft. McClellan and some other things that have affected the basic underlying economic drivers that were here,” Moriarity said.

“The market size is roughly still the same size it was in Anniston. It’s grown outward. And the competition’s increased so part of the challenge we want to take is what makes sense for downtown, where you’ve got a lot of capital investment and infrastructure and wonderful old buildings. You’ve got vacant space that can be filled. I don’t see that as a wholly negative thing. I think those are leasing and redevelopment opportunities. We want to be sure that downtown has an identity that is suitable and fits its place in markets so that you can have a strong position. We want to be in a leading position for downtown, sort of recapturing its proper role.”

According to Moriarity, the updated zoning process must be incremental and methodical in order for the final product to have any chance at longevity.

“If we came in and said ‘Let’s just tear it all down and start over, you wouldn’t have as good a product at the end,” Moriarity said. “We want to pace the development to match the market opportunity and also fit into a physical vision so that people say ‘Oh that feels like Anniston, but better. It fits the same place, but better.’”

The City of Anniston

Nicknamed “The Model City” by founders Samuel Noble and General Daniel Tyler, the city of Anniston is the commercial and industrial center of Calhoun County. The city was incorporated in 1883 and is located in the Appalachian foothills of Alabama, providing an array of living options, business opportunities, and recreational activities such as biking on the Chief Ladiga Trail and visiting the Anniston Museum of Natural History. For more information about the City of Anniston, visit anniston.al.gov.